

posting period. Provide copies of documents in the record on request and collect any fees prescribed by chapter 4 of Handbook AS-353, *Guide to Privacy, the Freedom of Information Act, and Records Management*. Provide copies of the proposal and comment form on request without charge.

34 Writing Tips

341 Numbers

- a. Always spell out a number that begins a sentence. Example: "Twenty-five customers attended the community meeting."
- b. For consistency, use the same style to express related numbers. Example: "Seventeen Post Office Box and six general delivery customers chose the same type of delivery at the Skyline Post Office, 10 miles away, rather than accepting rural route delivery to CBUs."
- c. In general, spell out numbers one to nine, and use figures for numbers above nine. If numbers one to nine precede any unit of measurement or time, use figures. As noted in section b above, however, use the same style to express related numbers. If most of the numbers are below 10, spell out those that are below 10. If most of the numbers are above 10, express them all in figures.
 - Example A (most numbers are below 10): "There are two mills, one school, one church, and 21 stores in the community."
 - Example B (most numbers are above 10): "The Little Towne Post Office serves 97 rural route customers, 57 Post Office Box customers, and 9 general delivery customers."

342 Contractions

Avoid use of contractions, such as "can't" or "couldn't."

343 Time

Throughout the proposal, type the abbreviations a.m. and p.m. in small letters followed by periods, but no spaces. Example: "Prior to suspension of service, the Furry River Post Office provided service from 7 a.m. to 12 noon and from 3 to 6 p.m. on Monday through Friday, and from 7 to 11 a.m. on Saturday." (Notice that when using a.m. to a.m. and p.m. to p.m., the first a.m. or p.m. is omitted.)

344 Customer Names

Do not refer to individual customers by name in the proposal or in the official record index. Do not refer to customers using terms that might be understood as lacking respect, e.g., senior citizens as "old people," "old folks," or "elderly."

35 60-Day Posting Period

351 Before Posting

351.1 Discontinuance Coordinator Review

Before posting, the district Discontinuance Coordinator validates the proposal checklist and certifies that the review has been conducted and all required activities performed.

351.2 Notification to Government Relations and Public Policy

The District Manager must provide advance notification to Government Relations and Public Policy at Headquarters and to Area Public Affairs before posting the proposal for the 60-day posting period. An electronic copy of the proposal should be provided with this notification.

352 Posting

352.1 General

A copy of the written proposal and an invitation for comments must be prominently posted for at least 60 days in the retail facility under study, the retail facility proposed to serve as the supervising facility, and any facility likely to serve a significant number of customers of the retail facility under study. Always begin the count at day zero, with the day after posting becoming day one. For offices whose operations are suspended, the posting instead takes place at the Postal Service-operated retail installation providing alternative service, since that is where customers can see it. The proposal and invitation for comments must be round-date-stamped on the date of posting and the date of removal. Provide the affected facilities with additional copies of the proposal and comment forms to be given to customers on request. A copy of the official record must also be available at affected facilities for public inspection during normal office hours. Copies of documents in the official record are available in accordance with 334 above.

352.2 Letter of Instructions

The Discontinuance Coordinator sends a letter of instructions, and copies of the proposal and invitation for comments, to responsible personnel at each affected facility for posting as required by section 352.1. The letter of instructions explains procedures for posting the proposal and the invitation for comments. Include in the letter the dates for posting (at least 60 days). In computing the posting days, begin the count with zero as the first day and include every calendar day thereafter for at least 60 days. This computation ensures that the proposal is available for the mandatory 60 days required by law. Documents should be posted at the start of business hours and removed on the appropriate day at the close of business.

352.3 Invitation for Comments

An official invitation for comments must be round-date-stamped and posted, at the same time as the proposal, for at least 60 days. The invitation for comments must state a deadline for customer comments. The invitation must also include the name and telephone number of the Postal Service representative to contact about the proposal and must indicate that copies of the proposal and comment forms are available on request in the affected facilities.

352.4 Comment Forms

Comment forms, along with a copy of the proposal, must be made available to customers on request. No fee is charged for these copies. Use this form only during the 60-day posting period. Any comment forms completed by customers and provided to responsible persons must be promptly forwarded to the Discontinuance Coordinator.

353 After Posting

353.1 Letter of Instructions

Before the end of the 60-day posting period, the Discontinuance Coordinator must send instructions for removal of the proposal and the invitation for comments to responsible personnel at the affected facilities where the proposal is posted under 352.1. The instructions must provide the date for removing the proposal and the invitation for comments. The instructions must also advise the responsible facility personnel to round-date-stamp the proposal and the invitation for comments on the date of removal and return them, with the official record, to the Discontinuance Coordinator. The instructions must also include guidelines for posting the *Notice of Taking Proposal and Comments Under Internal Consideration*.

353.2 Notice of Taking Proposal and Comments Under Internal Consideration

Responsible personnel at the affected facilities where the proposal has been posted under section 352.1 must post a *Notice of Taking Proposal and Comments Under Internal Consideration* after the 60-day posting period. This notice should be posted until further instructions are received from the Discontinuance Coordinator.

353.3 Analysis of Comments

The Discontinuance Coordinator prepares an analysis of customers' written comments. Group the comments by the type of concern (postal and non-postal) and by subject. Indicate the number of customers expressing each concern. If no comments are received, the Discontinuance Coordinator prepares a memorandum for the record stating that no comments were received. If possible, comments subsequently received should also be included in the analysis. The analysis should list and briefly describe each point favorable to the proposal and each point unfavorable to the proposal. To the extent possible, the analysis should identify how many comments support each point listed. After completing the analysis, the District Manager must review the proposal and re-evaluate all the tentative conclusions previously made in light of additional customer information and views in the record.

353.4 Response to Customer Comments

A written response must be sent to each customer comment. The response must address the individual concerns expressed by the customer.

36 Revising Proposal

361 Definition

A revised proposal contains new information obtained during and after the 60-day posting period. In essence, it is a new proposal that updates the original proposal. If there are no changes to the original proposal and no comments were received, a revised proposal is not necessary. However, a memorandum should be included in the record stating the dates and locations the proposal was posted while noting that no comments or other reasons for modifying the proposal have triggered revision.

362 Components of Revised Proposal

362.1 Description

Most sections in a revised proposal are identical with the original proposal. Exceptions are listed in the following sections. Be sure to substitute the terms "revised proposal" throughout the text where appropriate.

362.2 Cover Page

Change the cover page to read “revised proposal.”

362.3 Responsiveness to Community Postal Needs

Update the proposal to include information about posting of the original proposal, comments received, and Postal Service responses to those comments. State the number of comments received and indicate whether each was favorable or unfavorable. List each concern, the number of customers expressing that concern, and the Postal Service response.

362.4 Effect on Community

Make sure that this section reflects current information about the community. For example, ensure that businesses are listed correctly. If information in the official record is ambiguous or incorrect, resolve the ambiguity or error using a memorandum to the record.

362.5 Effect on Employees

Note any changes that have occurred since the 60-day posting period.

362.6 Economic Savings

Update salary information and other economic factors, as appropriate.

362.7 Summary

Revise the summary to include information regarding posting of the original proposal at respective locations and any comments received.

362.8 Notice

Change the word “proposal” to “revised proposal” where appropriate.

363 60-Day Posting Period

If a significant change is made in the proposal (e.g., a change in the proposed type of alternative service), repost the revised proposal with an invitation for comments for a new 60-day posting period. Use the procedures in 352.

363.1 Significant Change

The following is an example of a significant change. The original proposal was to extend rural delivery. After reviewing customer comments, it is determined that a contractor-operated retail facility would better meet the needs of the community. The revised proposal entails establishment of a contractor-operated retail facility instead. This revised proposal must be posted for a new 60-day posting period. After that, follow the procedures in part 353.

4 Final Determination

41 District Review

411 Official Record

The official record must be thoroughly reviewed, and the reason for discontinuance must be documented in the record. The more recent PS Form 4920 and, if applicable, the revised proposal must reflect current information. The Discontinuance Coordinator must thoroughly review the official record to ensure compliance with federal law, Postal Service policy, and the instructions in this handbook.

412 Log of Discontinuance Actions

Before forwarding the official record to the District Manager and Headquarters, the Discontinuance Coordinator must certify, and enter into the record a completed log of discontinuance actions. This log certifies that a thorough review of the official record is completed and that everything is in order. It is the Discontinuance Coordinator's responsibility to update the log throughout the discontinuance process.

413 Transmittal from Manager, Post Office Operations

The MPOO, must transmit a memorandum to the District Manager along with a complete copy of the official record.

414 Certification of Record

After a complete review of the record is conducted and necessary updates and corrections are made, the District Manager prepares a memorandum for the record certifying that all comments and documents in the record are originals or true copies of the originals.

415 Review and Re-Evaluation by District Manager

The District Manager must review the proposal and re-evaluate all previous conclusions in light of additional customer information and views in the record, as well as the MPOO's memorandum. The District Manager must then decide whether the proposed discontinuance is warranted.

415.1 Proposal Not Warranted

If the District Manager decides against the proposed discontinuance, the District Manager must then prominently post a notice in the affected facilities where the proposal was posted under section 352.1. The notice must state that the proposal has been found unwarranted and that no further action on the proposal to discontinue the installation is planned. The following are examples of reasons why a proposal may not be warranted:

- a. The reason for the discontinuance is inappropriate or based solely on operation of a small Post Office at a deficit.
- b. Documentation in the record does not support the proposal.

- c. The proposed alternate service does not provide effective and regular service to the community.
- d. The discontinuance investigation was not conducted in accordance with the law and Postal Service policy.

415.2 Proposal Warranted; Transmittal from District to Headquarters

If the District Manager decides that the proposed discontinuance is justified, the District Manager provides a complete file of the official record to the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, at Headquarters. In his or her transmittal, the District Manager must certify the official record is complete and that all documents in the record are originals or true and correct copies.

42 Headquarters Review

421 General

At Headquarters, the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, forwards the official record of the proposed discontinuance to the Headquarters Review Coordinator. The Headquarters Review Coordinator reviews official records in the order received, except in special circumstances. Each proposal is evaluated on its own merit. Final determinations and any decision on appeal must rely exclusively and completely upon information in the official record. Thus, *thorough documentation is of the utmost importance*. If necessary, return the record, with instructions, to the District Manager for additional work. Add a copy of any such instruction and response to the official record.

422 Determinations

422.1 Returned for Further Action or Information

If the official record contains deficiencies or inconsistencies, it may be returned to the District Manager with instructions to give additional consideration to specific areas in the record or to provide additional information. Include these instructions and the response in the official record. No determination is reached at this point. The District Manager may resubmit the proposal and official record to Headquarters after providing further documentation or clarification. Follow the procedures in 41 for resubmitting proposals.

422.2 Proposal Not Warranted

When the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, determines that the proposal is not warranted, the proposal is denied and no further action may be taken on the record sent. The record is returned to the District Manager and written reasons for the determination are provided. The District Manager must then prominently post a notice in the affected facilities as instructed in section 415.1.

422.3 Proposal Warranted

422.31 General

When the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, determines that the proposal is warranted, and no further revision is necessary, authorization to proceed is provided to the District Manager. The Discontinuance Coordinator can proceed with composing the final determination and providing it to the District Manager. The following sections outline discontinuance instructions provided with the final determination document.

422.32 30-Day Public Notice

The District Manager must make sure that a copy of the final determination is prominently posted for at least 30 days in the affected facilities where the proposal was posted under 352.1. To ensure that the posting is at least 30 days, begin the count at day zero. A copy of the complete official record must be available for public inspection during normal business hours at each affected facility during the mandatory 30-day public notice period. If there is an error or other reason for amending the final determination, immediately contact the Headquarters Review Coordinator. No changes to a final determination are authorized without Headquarters' approval; if changes are authorized and made, explanation for the change must be appended to the administrative record and the posting period must begin anew. Provide copies of documents in the record to customers on request and collect payment of any fees as prescribed by chapter 4 of Handbook AS-353, *Guide to Privacy, the Freedom of Information Act and Records Management*.

422.33 Contents of Public Notice

The posting of the final determination must include the following notice: **"Copies of all materials on which this Final Determination is based are available for public inspection at the (Facility Name) during normal office hours."** If the retail facility subject to discontinuance is a Post Office, the Final Determination must also include the following notice: **"This Final Determination to (discontinue) (consolidate) the (Facility Name) may be appealed by any person served by that office to the Postal Regulatory Commission. Any appeal must be received by the Commission within 30 days of the date this Final Determination was posted. If an appeal is filed, copies of appeal documents prepared by the Postal Regulatory Commission, or the parties to the appeal, must be made available for public inspection at the (Facility Name) during normal office hours."**

422.34 Postal Bulletin Retail Facility Change Announcement

A *Postal Bulletin Retail Facility Change Announcement* form is also enclosed with the final determination. The MPOO or designee, must complete and mail the original and email a copy of the announcement form to the Headquarters Review Coordinator on the day the final determination posting is *removed* (the first day following the completion of the 30-day public notice period). The MPOO must also include a copy of the round-date-stamped final determination cover page from each location where the final determination was posted. At Headquarters, the original announcement form and the copy of the round-date-stamped final determination posting are entered into the official record. At the appropriate time, one copy of the announcement form is forwarded to Address Management at Headquarters for announcing the discontinuance or consolidation in the *Postal Bulletin*; the other is returned to the district for inclusion in the official record. Do *not* reproduce this form. Do *not* mail a copy to Address Management at Headquarters.

Note: In the event that an appeal is postmarked in the 30-day period but received by the Postal Regulatory Commission after the 30-day period, the Headquarters Review Coordinator will instruct field personnel on posting requirements.

422.35 Official Discontinuance

If there are no appeals to the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC), the retail facility is officially discontinued, at the earliest, 60 days after the first day of posting of the final determination. Please contact the Headquarters Review Coordinator if a specific date is required for official discontinuance. However, federal law prohibits an official discontinuance sooner than 60 days after the date the final determination was posted. Headquarters sends notice to the District Manager indicating whether an appeal is filed with the PRC. If an appeal is filed, Headquarters provides instructions on how to proceed.

422.36 Address Management System Database

When the District Manager receives notification from Headquarters that an appeal has not been filed with the PRC, the Discontinuance Coordinator must instruct the field Address Management unit to update the Address Management System (AMS) database. A copy of that instruction must be entered in the official record.

422.37 Facilities Database

The Facilities Database (FDB) coordinator must monitor the system to ensure the facility status is updated to reflect "Closed".

431 Notification**431.1 To Local Officials**

Follow local instructions for reporting an official discontinuance within the district.

431.2 To Customers

Notify impacted customers (delivery customers of that retail facility) of the official closure in writing. Additionally, the notification should also be posted in the lobby of the discontinued retail facility.

5 Appeal Procedures

51 General

511 Who May Appeal

Any person regularly served by a Post Office subject to discontinuance may appeal the decision to the Postal Regulatory Commission. The Postal Service's legal position is that the Commission does not have jurisdiction to act on challenges to the discontinuance of subordinate retail units (such as Classified Stations and Classified Branches) or contractor-operated retail facilities. Where persons regularly served by another type of USPS-operated retail facility subject to discontinuance file an appeal with the Postal Regulatory Commission, the General Counsel reserves the right to assert defenses, including the Commission's lack of jurisdiction over such appeals. When it elects not to challenge the Commission's jurisdiction over the discontinuance of subordinate Postal Service-operated retail facilities, the Postal Service does not waive any argument that it may have in federal court or in subsequent Commission proceedings concerning the Commission's authority to adjudicate appeals of subordinate retail facilities.

512 Where to Appeal

All appeals must be directed to:

POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION
901 NEW YORK AVENUE, NW, SUITE 200
WASHINGTON, DC 20268-0001

513 When to Appeal

Appeals must be received by the Commission within 30 days of the date the final determination was posted. An appeal is considered to have been received by the Commission as follows:

- a. If the appeal is mailed to the Commission, on the date of the postmark on the envelope or other cover.
- b. If otherwise lawfully delivered to the Commission, on the date determined based on any appropriate documentation or other indicia (as determined under PRC regulations).

514 Notification to District Manager

Headquarters provides notification to the District Manager indicating whether an appeal is filed.

515 Appeal Documents

The Office of General Counsel, at Headquarters, provides the District Manager with copies of all pleadings, notices, orders, briefs, and opinions filed in the appeal proceedings on behalf of the Commission or other parties to the appeal. The District Manager must ensure that copies of all these documents are included in the official record. The District Manager must also ensure that copies of these documents are prominently displayed in the affected facilities where the final determination is displayed under 422.32. The appeal documents must be made available for public inspection at the same facility or facilities during normal business hours. All documents (except the Commission's final order or decision) must be displayed until the final order or decision issues. The final order or decision must be displayed for 30 days in the

affected facilities where the final determination was displayed under 422.32. However, the final order or decision must also be displayed in the retail facility subject to discontinuance for 30 days or until the effective date of the discontinuance, whichever is sooner.

52 Discontinuance Pending Appeal

An affected installation may be discontinued before the final disposition of an appeal only by the authority of the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations. This authority does not permit discontinuance within the 60-day period after initial posting (see 422.35).

53 Postal Regulatory Commission Decisions

531 Final Determination Affirmed

If the Commission dismisses the appeal or affirms the Postal Service's determination, the official closing date of the installation must be published in the *Postal Bulletin*, effective after the date of the Commission's decision or order, if not previously implemented in accordance with 52. In any event, this authority does not permit discontinuance until 60 days after the first date that the final determination is posted (see 422.35).

532 Final Determination Remanded

532.1 General

If the Commission remands the Postal Service's determination for further action by the Postal Service, the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, may determine that the discontinuance is not warranted or may return the proposal for further consideration. The Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, provides instructions to the District Manager on the decision.

532.2 Discontinuance Not Warranted

Based on the Commission's decision or order, the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, may determine that the discontinuance is not warranted at this time. If so, the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, provides instructions to the District Manager to that effect. Based on the official record submitted, no further action may be taken to discontinue the affected installation. The District Manager must make sure that a copy of the Commission's decision or order is posted for 30 days at the affected facilities where the proposal and final determination were posted (see 352.1 and 422.32). A notice must also be posted at the same affected facilities, stating that the final determination to discontinue the installation is withdrawn and that no changes in service will occur at this time.

532.3 Returned for Further Consideration

Based on the Commission's decision or order, the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations may determine that the discontinuance proposal requires further consideration of other service alternatives or additional investigation and documentation. The Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, provides instructions for further consideration at an appropriate procedural stage.

6 Special Circumstances

61 Suspensions

611 Definition

Circumstances that may justify a suspension include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. A natural disaster.
- b. Termination of a lease or rental agreement when other quarters are not available, especially when the termination is sudden or unexpected.
- c. Lack of qualified personnel to operate the office.
- d. Severe health or safety hazard.
- e. Severe damage to, or destruction of, the office.
- f. Lack of adequate measures to safeguard the office or its revenues.

612 Authority

District Managers may suspend the operations of any independent Post Office, Classified Station, or Classified Branch under their jurisdiction for reasons such as those identified in 611.

613 Notification

613.1 To Headquarters

The District Manager (or a designee) must provide immediate notice of any suspension to the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations.

613.2 To Local Officials

Immediately notify the district Facility Database (FDB) Coordinator. Follow local instructions for reporting emergency suspension within the district. Use a copy of the emergency suspension notice for notification to the following:

- a. All direct reports to the District Manager
- b. The Vice President, Area Operations.
- c. State and national postmaster organizations.
- d. Transportation and logistics.
- e. Philatelic Operations. To stop and resume automatic distribution of commemorative stamps, notify:
POSTAL ACCOUNTS SECTION
FINANCE BRANCH
MINNEAPOLIS ACCOUNTING SERVICE CENTER
2825 LONE OAK PARKWAY
EAGAN, MN 55121-9312.

- f. Accounting services and Postmaster accounts.
- g. The upstream Processing and Distribution Center(s) responsible for processing mail to and from the relevant retail facility.
- h. Address Management.
- i. Human Resources.
- j. Management at affected facilities, including the suspended retail facility, the supervising office, and the facilities most likely to serve a significant number of customers of the suspended retail facility.
- k. Discontinuance Coordinator.
 - (1) The Discontinuance Coordinator must be immediately provided information to enter in the log of discontinuance actions. That coordinator may be called on to provide information to Government Relations and Public Policy at Headquarters during a Congressional inquiry.
 - (2) A copy of the suspension notice must be placed in the official record when the installation is investigated for permanent discontinuance.
- l. Facilities Service Office for appropriate action regarding the lease and possible alternate quarters.

613.3 To Customers

Notify affected customers immediately by individual letter. Include in the notice the following information:

- a. Effective date.
- b. Reason for suspension.
- c. Alternate services available.
- d. Nearest retail facilities and hours of service.
- e. Name and telephone number of person to contact for more information.

614 Alternate Service

Establish alternate service as quickly as possible. If a discontinuance proposal appears likely, make every effort to provide the alternate service that is most likely to be recommended in the discontinuance proposal. A change from emergency replacement service often generates community opposition regardless of the rationale.

615 Employee Reassignment

Temporarily reassign all eligible employees of the suspended facility according to *Employee and Labor Relations Manual* 354. Reassignment of bargaining-unit employees must be in accordance with the applicable provisions of the National Agreement.

616 Suspension Review Team

When a District Manager suspends operations at a retail facility, a suspension review team must be formed to review the decision. The suspension review team members must include the Discontinuance Coordinator; the MPOO or designee; a representative from the Facility Services Office; and in the case of the suspension of a Post Office staffed by a postmaster, state presidents of each postmaster organization or their designees.

- a. Members of the suspension review team must conduct an onsite visit to the suspended facility.
- b. Within 10 business days of the onsite visit, the suspension review team must notify the District Manager and the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, of their recommendation to suspend or not suspend the facility. In the case of the suspension of a Post Office staffed by a postmaster, the national postmaster organizations are also notified.
- c. If the suspension review team recommends suspension, the formal discontinuance process should be initiated.

- d. If the suspension review team finds that there is insufficient justification to suspend the office, the retail facility should be reopened unless otherwise directed by the Area Vice President or the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations.

617 Plan of Action

The District Manager must determine a plan of action to restore service, secure suitable alternate quarters, take other necessary corrective action, or initiate a discontinuance study within 90 days. That plan of action must be provided to the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, no later than the 90 days after suspension takes effect.

618 Restoration of Service

Immediately notify the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, of restoration of service.

62 Name Change

621 General

A Post Office should normally bear the official name of the incorporated city, town, or borough in which it is located, as shown in its charter. A Post Office located in an unincorporated place should generally bear the approved name of the principal community served (normally the community in which located) or the approved name of the town or township, if it serves a number of communities within a town or township.

622 Current Instructions

Information related to facility name and ZIP Code assignments and changes is provided in POM 123.4.

623 Use of Branch or Station Designation

Classified Stations, Classified Branches, and non-personnel units are Postal Service-operated subordinate units located within main Post Offices' service areas to provide one or more services at sites convenient to customers. The staffing of a Post Office with a Postmaster on a part-time basis or with another type of personnel does not affect that facility's status as a Post Office and does not make it a subordinate unit. The definitions of Classified Stations, Classified Branches, and non-personnel units are as follows:

- a. *Classified Units.* Classified units are stations and branches operated by Postal Service employees in quarters owned or leased by the Postal Service.
- b. *Stations.* Stations are located within the corporate limits or city carrier delivery area of the city or town in which the main Post Office is located.
- c. *Branches.* Branches are located outside the corporate limits or city carrier delivery area of the city or town in which the main office is located.
- f. *Nonpersonnel Units.* Nonpersonnel units are small, non-staffed stations and branches that are served by a rural carrier in quarters typically provided by a contractor, in which case the contractor also furnishes custodial and security support. A non-personnel unit provides on a self-service basis essential mail services such as the collection and delivery of mail and the sale of stamps. Non-city carriers, who are required to remain at non-personnel units for a minimum of 15 minutes each day their routes operate, provide other services such as the sale of Postal Money Orders and the acceptance and delivery of Certified Mail™, Insured Mail™, Registered Mail™, Delivery Confirmation™, Signature Confirmation™, Collect on Delivery (COD), and all other special services.

63 Merging Facilities

631 Definition

The dictionary definition of merge is “to unite or combine.” In discontinuance investigations, this term is often misused and misunderstood. *Mergers give rise to a discontinuance and should be referred to as such. Do not use the term “merge” in the investigative process or in the proposal;* rather, refer to a discontinuance. Coordinators generally define a merge in one of two ways:

- a. Two or more towns (each with one or more independent Post Offices) combined into a single incorporated village, town, or city with one administrative Post Office.
- b. Two or more towns (each with one or more independent Post Offices) combined by building a replacement facility (centrally located between the existing Post Offices) that serves as the administrative Post Office for all the delivery areas involved.

632 A Hypothetical Situation

632.1 Background

632.11 General

There are two rural unincorporated communities in the same geographical area. Population growth is not great; however, the communities are growing together. Each community has a Post Office. The Post Offices are located within a mile and a half of each other. For simplicity, we refer to these two facilities as Post Office A and Post Office B.

632.12 Post Office A

At Post Office A:

- a. The EAS-13 postmaster position is not vacant. The clerk and rural carrier are career employees.
- b. There are eight hours of service daily, Monday through Friday, and three hours on Saturday.
- c. The building is unsafe because of structural deterioration.
- d. There is a 30-day lease cancellation clause.
- e. There is some growth in the community.
- f. There are 350 customers: 10 general delivery, 100 Post Office box, and 240 rural route customers.
- g. Postal Service revenue has increased each of the past three fiscal years. The average number of daily retail window transactions is 48.
- h. There are two permit mailers.
- i. There are eight small businesses (two are new), two churches, and one elementary school.

632.13 Post Office B

At Post Office B:

- a. The EAS-11 postmaster position is vacant. The OIC is non-career. No career employees are at the office.
- b. There are four hours of service daily, Monday through Saturday.
- c. The building is deteriorating and unsafe. No alternate quarters are available.
- d. There is a 30-day lease cancellation clause.
- e. There is low growth in the community.
- f. There are 30 general delivery customers.

- g. Postal Service revenue has declined each of the past three fiscal years. The average number of daily retail window transactions is 11.
- h. There are no permit mailers or postage meter customers.
- i. There are two businesses and one church in the community.

632.2 Suggested Plan of Action

632.21 Post Office A

Move the Post Office to adequate quarters. The District Manager does not require approval from the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, to move Postal Service operations from an unsuitable building to a suitable building in a geographical area where customers would have no change in service, address, or ZIP Code. However, the regulations in Title 39, *Code of Federal Regulations*, section 241.4, Expansion, Relocation, Construction of New Post Offices, must be followed, and a customer who disagrees with a local decision may appeal to the Vice President, Facilities. Explain to customers that the Post Office is not closing but moving to other suitable quarters within the community. Present the positive aspects of the move to the customers. Advise the customers that consideration is being given to serving Post Office B customers from the same facility; in such an event, the Post Office name may change to identify both communities. If it seems desirable to discontinue Post Office B, the best location for Post Office A is midway between the two Post Offices. Make sure that the new quarters can accommodate the workload of both Post Offices' operations. If suitable alternate quarters are not available and a new facility is constructed, the site plans and funding must be available and approved before any proposal can be presented to the customers. Do not proceed on promises or conjecture.

632.22 Post Office B

After Post Office A is moved, propose to discontinue Post Office B. Use as a justification the deterioration of the building (supported by photographs and safety reports), the lack of suitable alternate quarters in the community, and the decline in service needs. Propose Post Office Box and general delivery at Post Office A and extension of rural delivery from Post Office A. Propose a name change for Post Office A to identify both communities A and B. Focus on the positive aspects and service improvements of the change.

632.23 Post Office Name Change

Examples of Post Office names for this hypothetical situation are shown below. (Consult your local Address Management unit for name change requirements.)

- a. A & B Post Office.
- b. A Post Office Serving B.

632.24 Headquarters Review

When making a proposal similar to this hypothetical situation, remember the following:

- a. The Post Office A move to suitable alternate quarters must be complete or, in the case of new construction, a target date set *before* sending the proposal to discontinue Post Office B to Headquarters. The final determination to discontinue Post Office B is decided, among other justifications, based on the definite availability of suitable quarters.
- b. Adequate justification for discontinuance must be clearly stated and documented in the official record.

64 ZIP Code Elimination

641 General

The ZIP Code for each address formerly served by the discontinued Post Office ordinarily is the ZIP Code of the discontinued Post Office.

642 Discontinuance**642.1 Community Place Name**

In a Post Office discontinuance, it is customary to retain the community place name and ZIP Code of the discontinued facility. If it is determined as necessary to eliminate the ZIP Code of the Post Office proposed for discontinuance, the District Manager must submit a request and justification to the Vice President, Area Operations, for approval.

642.11 Request for ZIP Code Elimination

The District Manager must receive approval *before* telling customers that their ZIP Code will change and *before* the 60-day proposal is posted. The request must include, at a minimum, the number of deliveries affected and the number of unused ZIP Codes remaining in the three- digit ZIP Code area. Justification for ZIP Code elimination should be based on operational requirements.

642.2 Conversion or Consolidation

When a Post Office is converted into a Classified Station or Classified Branch, or when a Postal Service-operated retail facility is consolidated by conversion into a contractor-operated retail facility, the ZIP Code remains the same as the original facility. The Vice President, Area Operations, must approve name and ZIP Code elimination for contractor-operated retail facilities, Classified Stations, and Classified Branches.

642.3 Post Office Box Range

If the retail facility being discontinued has Post Office Boxes, give consideration to the Post Office Box number range. Duplicate Post Office Box number ranges within the same preferred last line (City, State) create problems for mail distribution and ZIP Code assignment. Renumbering Post Office Boxes to eliminate address duplications should be done at the time of the discontinuance.

642.4 Minimizing Address Changes for Customers

It may be necessary to evaluate the feasibility of moving Post Office Boxes to a neighboring office to minimize any customer address or ZIP Code changes. Work with district Marketing and Delivery to determine the most appropriate alternate delivery service that has the least impact on customers. This option is not recommended for customers who are receiving free Post Office Box service because they are not eligible for carrier delivery. In these instances, it is recommended that carrier delivery options including roadside boxes, cluster box units, and/or non-personnel units be pursued before evaluating movement of Post Office Box sections.

642.5 Rural and Contract Delivery Route Numbers and Box Ranges

Rural route or highway contract route numbers should not be duplicated within a finance number for pay purposes. Rural route or highway contract route box numbers may not be duplicated within a route. Renumbering routes and boxes should be done at the time of the discontinuance.

642.6 Customer Notification

Customers should be notified of plans to change Post Office Box numbers and the ZIP Code before the 60-day proposal posting under 35. If the address change increases Post Office Box fees for any customers, specific Post Office Box fee information should also be clearly communicated to customers before posting. This applies even when delivery is available and Post Office Box service at a neighboring facility is a customer option.

643 Consolidation**643.1 Community Place Name and ZIP Code**

When a contractor-operated retail facility is established in lieu of a Postal Service-operated retail facility, it is customary to retain the community place name and ZIP Code of the discontinued retail facility. Changes in name and ZIP codes require the approval of the Vice President, Area Operations.

643.2 Customer Notification

The first notice to customers that consideration is being given to consolidating a Postal Service-operated retail facility and establishing a contractor-operated retail facility should state clearly that customer addresses will *not* change (except as approved in accordance with 642).

644 Official Record Documentation**644.1 Post Office Discontinuance**

The official record must include any letter authorizing or denying ZIP Code elimination (see 233 and 642.11).

644.2 Post Office Consolidation

The official record must include any letter authorizing or denying ZIP Code elimination (see 233 and 642.11).

7 Best Practices in Discontinuance Process

71 Best Practices by Step in the Process

711 Suspensions

The following must be accomplished:

- a. Provide sufficient valid reason to suspend.
- b. Provide sufficient documentation justifying suspension.
- c. For Post Offices, involve postmaster organizations.
- d. Notify and adequately explain reason for suspension to customers.
- e. Identify most likely recommended permanent service as temporary alternate service.
- f. Conduct timely investigations and follow-up. (A plan of action should be sent to the Headquarters Review Coordinator through the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, within 90 days after the suspension occurs.)
- g. Conduct and document a search for suitable alternate quarters, if applicable.
- h. Conduct and document a search for qualified personnel, if applicable.

712 Initial Investigation

The following must be accomplished:

- a. The District Manager or the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, must give authorization to study.
- b. Adequately investigate alternate services.
- c. Conduct and document search for suitable alternate quarters, if applicable.
- c. Provide sufficient reason or documentation to support discontinuance.

713 Questionnaires

The following must be accomplished:

- a. Provide reason for discontinuance or recommended alternate service in cover letter.
- b. Provide address for customer to send written comments in cover letter.
- d. Send surveys in a timely manner.
- e. Thoroughly complete analysis. (Customer concerns should be listed and paraphrased, with the number of customers expressing each concern and the Postal Service response. Concerns should be classified as postal or non-postal.)
- f. Adequately research and address customer comments. A response should be sent to each customer who submits a questionnaire, and the response should address specific customer concerns.

714 Community Meetings

The following must be accomplished:

- a. Use the community meeting in all discontinuance actions except as otherwise indicated by the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, or the Vice President, Area Operations.
- b. Conduct meetings in a timely manner.
- c. Select time and site to encourage customer participation.
- d. Give adequate notice to customers.
- e. Thoroughly record documentation and analysis of meeting.
- f. Present a full range of alternate service options, together with advantages and disadvantages.

715 Proposal

Do the following:

- a. Clearly state reason for discontinuance in Section I of the proposal.
- b. Document the record to support the proposal.
- c. Adequately answer customer concerns from questionnaires and community meetings.
- d. Verify existence of any interested offerors when a contractor-operated retail facility is recommended.
- e. Obtain prior authorization from the Vice President, Area Operations, before proposing ZIP Code elimination.
- f. Include information in the record about petitions and Congressional inquiries.
- g. Explain effect on all employees, including those with non-career status.
- h. Post proposal and invitation for comments concurrently in all affected facilities, including the facility under study (if not suspended), the proposed supervising facility, and the facilities most likely to serve a significant number of the delivery or retail customers of the facility under study.
- i. Post proposal and invitation for comments *together* for at least 60 days (always begin the count at day zero).
- j. Round-date-stamp proposal and invitation for comments on date of posting and date of removal.
- k. Make sure information in the proposal is consistent with PS Form 4920.
- l. Make comment forms and copies of proposal available for customers.
- m. Make official record available at all affected retail facilities.
- n. Thoroughly record analysis of comments.
- o. Respond to customer comments.
- p. Write or prepare revised proposal with information from proposal posting, customer comments on proposal, the community meeting dates, and customer comments submitted at the community meeting.
- q. Accurately state the number of businesses in the community (need to include small and in-home businesses operated from rural residences).
- r. Check with Facility Service Office (FSO) on historical value of building owned or leased by the Postal Service.

716 Official Record

The following must be accomplished:

- b. Inconsistencies, contradictions, and anomalies must be clarified in the record by a memorandum to the record.
- c. List docket and item numbers on each document.
- d. Enter documents in chronological order.
- e. Complete or review index for consistency with the entries.
- f. Include legible photocopies or both sides of two-sided documents.
- i. Provide current and complete PS Form 4920.
- j. Update documentation. (Example: The description of community omits or miscounts significant local establishments, such as schools, businesses, and churches, or the analysis of community postal needs omits or miscounts bulk mailing permits.)
- k. Certify record.
- l. District Manager must make transmittal to Headquarters.

Appendix A

Glossary of Terms

Administrative Office

A Post Office that has administrative control or responsibility of a contractor-operated retail facility or Classified Station or Branch.

Affirmed

An appeal decision in which the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) agrees with and approves the Postal Service decision to discontinue.

Appeal

After a final determination is posted, a request for review of the final determination that is filed by persons served by the facility being discontinued. The appeal must be filed with the Postal Regulatory Commission in Washington, DC, within 30 days of the posting of the final determination. The Commission then has up to 120 days in which to consider the appeal and issue a decision.

Classified Branch

A retail facility that is Postal Service-operated and is under the administration of an independent Post Office. A branch is located outside the corporate limits or city carrier delivery area of the city or town in which the main Post Office is located. The branch name is generally used in the last line of the address.

Classified Station

A retail facility that is Postal Service-operated and is under the administration of an independent Post Office. A station is located within the corporate limits or city carrier delivery area of the city or town in which the main Post Office is located. The name of the station is generally not used as the city name in the last line of the address.

Closing

An action in which Post Office operations are permanently discontinued without providing a replacement facility in the community. Replacement services are provided by a neighboring Post Office, contract delivery service, rural delivery, or city delivery.

Cluster Box Unit (CBU)

A secure free-standing unit of individually locked mail compartments installed and maintained by the Postal Service at no cost to the customer. These units are placed on the public right of way or other locations adjacent to the existing Post Office carrier's line of travel. Parcel lockers may also be installed for customer convenience.

Community

A general term that denotes a group of individuals, with common interests, living in a particular area. These common interests may arise from social, business, religious, governmental, scholastic, or recreational associations and may involve consideration of shared institutions, traditions, and public services that help bind the people of the community together. Institutions, services, and associations do not always have clear centers or geographic boundaries. A community, therefore, is not necessarily formally organized or confined within corporate limits.

Consolidation

An action that converts a Postal Service facility into a contractor-operated retail facility. The contractor reports to an administrative office.

Contract Delivery Service (CDS)

A contract delivery route that provides mail transportation between Post Offices, or other designated points, where mail is received or dispatched. Box delivery, collection service, and other mail services may also be provided on these routes.

Contractor-Operated Retail Facility

A facility that provides selected postal retail services to the public according to a contract with the Postal Service.

Discontinuance

An action in which an independent Post Office, Classified Station, or Classified Branch is permanently closed or consolidated.

Docket Number

A number assigned to the proposal that is the ZIP Code of the office proposed for discontinuance or consolidation. The docket number must be on the top right corner of each page in the official record.

Emergency Suspension

An action in which a District Manager suspends operations of any USPS-operated retail facility in his/her jurisdiction because an emergency or other condition requires such action.

Final Determination

A written decision that approved by the Vice President, Delivery and Post Office Operations, to discontinue an independent Post Office, Classified Station, or Classified Branch. The final determination is based on information in the official record and must be publicly posted for at least 30 days.

Government Relations and Public Policy

The Postal Service organizational unit at Headquarters that investigates and responds to congressional inquiries.

Independent Post Office

An organizational entity subordinate to a district with responsibility for customer services, local delivery, the receipt and dispatch of all classes of mail, and in some instances, processing and distribution of mail for other Post Offices in the surrounding geographic area.

Nonpersonnel Rural Unit (NPU)

A self-service unit that provides essential mail services, such as the collection and delivery of ordinary mail and sale of stamps. Services may include the sale of Postal Money Orders and the acceptance and delivery of Certified Mail, Insurance, Registered Mail, Collect on Delivery (COD), Delivery Confirmation, Signature Confirmation, and other special services. These services are provided to customers of non-personnel units by non-city carriers when they visit the units. Carriers are required to remain at the unit a minimum of 15 minutes each day their routes are scheduled to operate, to afford customers the services not otherwise available from the unit.

Official Record

A chronological file of all information that the District Manager considers in relation to the proposed discontinuance of a retail facility. No information or views submitted by customers may be excluded, whether or not it tends to support the proposal.

Parcel Locker

A compartment in or near a cluster box unit (CBU) that is used for the delivery of packages, large articles, or accumulated vacation hold mail too large to fit in a mail receptacle. The carrier provides a key for the customer at the time of delivery. The key is typically retained in the parcel locker upon retrieval of the mail. This eliminates the need for customers to take delivery of their mail by visiting a USPS-operated retail facility.

Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC)

An independent government agency to which appeals of Post Office discontinuance final determinations are sent. The PRC's address is 901 New York Ave, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20268-0001. An opinion by the PRC is rendered within 120 days of the appeal.

Postal Service-Operated Retail Facility

An independent Post Office, Classified Station, or Classified Branch operated by the Postal Service.

Pre-Proposal Investigation

An initial review of the retail facility and the community — along with questionnaires, community meetings, and other activities — that is conducted before the discontinuance proposal is written.

Proposal

A document that explains — both to higher Postal Service managers and to all persons served by the affected retail facilities — the nature and justification of the proposed change in service. The written proposal must address each of the following matters in separate sections: a. Responsiveness to Community Postal Service Needs, b. Effect on Community, c. Effect on Employees, d. Economic Savings, e. Other Factors, f. Summary, and g. Notice.

Remand

An appeal decision from the Postal Regulatory Commission that does not agree with the Postal Service's decision or process to discontinue a Postal Service-operated retail facility and that returns the matter to the Postal Service for further action.

Revised Proposal

A document that includes information relative to the original proposal to discontinue a retail facility, customer comments to the proposal with appropriate Postal Service responses, and any new information not included in the original proposal. A significant change to the original proposal requires reposting the proposal. The format is the same as that for the proposal.

Suitable Alternate Quarters

An available facility that meets the specific requirements of the Postal Service in order to continue Postal Service operations in a community. Criteria for a Postal Service-operated retail facility vary from those of a contractor-operated retail facility.

Appendix B

References

Administrative Support Manual

- 412 — Military Post Offices, Establishment and Discontinuance
- 518.2 — Facility Planning, Community Contact
- 519.224 — Design and Construction, Plaques Honoring an Individual

Domestic Mail Manual

- 508.4 — Recipient Services, Post Office Box Service

Employee and Labor Relations Manual

- 354 — Assignment of Unassigned Employees

Postal Operations Manual

- 123 — Post Offices, Stations, Branches, Contract Postal Units, and Nonpersonnel Units

Handbook AS-353, Guide to Privacy, the Freedom of Information Act, and Records Management

United States Code

- Title 39 USC 404 (d)

ELM 113.3 Organizational Entities

Organization entities include the following:

(k-)

Post Office – an organizational entity subordinate to a district, managed by a postmaster, with responsibility for customer services, local delivery, the receipt and dispatch of all classes of mail, and in some instances, processing and distribution of mail for other Post Offices in the surrounding geographic area. A postmaster may be responsible for the management of more than one Post Office, and duties may be performed by designated subordinate personnel at the direction of the postmaster, including when the postmaster is not physically present.

POM 139.116 Authorized Mailability Decisions

Postmasters or other designated personnel under a postmaster's supervision may decide whether articles and substances other than written, printed, or graphic matter are nonmailable and must, where appropriate, refuse to accept for mailing such matter determined to be nonmailable. Where necessary, the Pricing and Classification Service Center (PCSC) ~~RGSC~~ should be consulted in determining mailability. If the mailer wants to review the initial postmaster's decision, the postmaster or designated subordinate personnel must, with the mailer's consent, refer a sample and send a complete statement of the facts to the PCSC ~~RGSC~~-manager. After the manager's decision is made, further appeal may be made by the mailer under 39 CFR 953, Rules of Practice in Proceedings Relative to Mailability. Postmasters and designated subordinate personnel are authorized to take any steps reasonable and necessary to protect Postal Service employees and equipment from the effects of potentially dangerous or injurious materials or substances found in the mail (see ASM 223.4).

POM 151.22 Postmasters of City Delivery Offices

Postmasters are responsible for ensuring ~~direct~~-supervision of SBM operations to achieve service standards and to deal effectively with variances.

Postmasters are also responsible for ensuring that rural carriers maintain a supply of stamp stock and PS Form 3227-R order forms sufficient to meet the needs of the customers on the route.

POM 665-Postmaster Duties

Postmasters are required to ~~do~~ensure the following:

a. Withhold distribution of Registered Mail, Insured Mail, Certified Mail, and COD Mail to the carrier, unless the contract requires that the carrier deliver such mail.

b. Not provide mail to the carrier outside of the regular lock pouch before it has reached the Post Office to which it is addressed.

ASM 122.1-Full-Time Offices

Postmasters of full-time offices (EAS-11 and above) are scheduled to work a 40-hour workweek. Normally, this schedule is set at 8 hours, 5 days a week, Monday through Friday. A postmaster relief/replacement or subordinate supervisor is scheduled to relieve the postmaster and to provide service as necessary on the sixth day. However, these postmasters may request from their district managers that they be assigned to a permanent schedule that includes not less than 4 hours on Saturday with equivalent time off on one of the workdays Monday through Friday in the same service week. A postmaster relief/replacement or other designee may also be scheduled to relieve a postmaster and to provide service as necessary during hours of the service week when the postmaster is scheduled to work or is working at another Post Office.

ELM 113.3(k)

Post Office – an organizational entity subordinate to a district, managed by a postmaster, with responsibility for customer services, local delivery, the receipt and dispatch of all classes of mail, and in some instances, processing and distribution of mail for other Post Offices in the surrounding geographic area. A postmaster may be responsible for the management of more than one Post Office, and duties may be performed by designated subordinate personnel at the direction of the postmaster, including when the postmaster is not physically present.

POM 139.116

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POM 151.22

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- a. Withhold distribution of Registered Mail, Insured Mail, Certified Mail, and COD Mail to the carrier, unless the contract requires that the carrier deliver such mail.
 - b. Not provide mail to the carrier outside of the regular lock pouch before it has reached the Post Office to which it is addressed.
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ASM 122.1

Postmasters of full-time offices (EAS-11 and above) are scheduled to work a 40-hour workweek. Normally, this schedule is set at 8 hours, 5 days a week, Monday through Friday. A postmaster relief/replacement or subordinate supervisor is scheduled to relieve the postmaster and to provide service as necessary on the sixth day. However, these postmasters may request from their district managers that they be assigned to a permanent schedule that includes not less than 4 hours on Saturday with equivalent time off on one of the workdays Monday through Friday in the same service week. A postmaster relief/replacement or other designee may also be scheduled to relieve a postmaster and to provide service as necessary during hours of the service week when the postmaster is scheduled to work or is working at another Post Office.